[19] CHAPTER 3

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

I. Natural Regions

131 The Bambara live in a region stretching between the 11th and 14th degrees of latitude north and between the 7th and 11th degrees of longitude west. They are grouped around the upper Senegal and upper Niger in the zone of basins bordered on the south by the Fouta-Djallon and the Guinea Ridge. The land is divided into several natural regions.

A. The Upper Niger

133 135 Framed by the outer ranges of the Fouta-Djallon and the cliffs of the Manding plateau, witness of the Pre-Cambrian shelf, the region is essentially schistose, with small veins of quartz and chimneys of dolerite; there are large intrusions of granite to the north 50 kilometers from Bamako, to the northwest and north of Siguiri, and to the south at the approach to the massif of the Fouta-Djallon. All the region is rich in gold. Several centers have long been exploited [316] by the natives by means of a network of narrow shafts which reach down to the auriferous seam. The whole region is encrusted with a shell of iron.

133 The region of the upper Niger is an immense plain covered with mammilliform hills. The plain rises gradually from the pass of Bamako to the mountains of the south, broken only by occasional dikes, such as that of Kouroussa-Kankan. The overall relief is very simple and monotonous; the local relief is very animated and varied because of the network of valleys hemmed in by steep cliffs 10 to 12 meters high.

The Niger, fed by the Tinkisso, the Milo, the Fié and, the Sankarani, reaches Bamako with a width of about 900 meters. It flows through a plain three to four kilometers wide in a southwest-northeast direction up to Timbuktu. It undergoes an annual rise which depends solely on the amount of rainfall. From Kouroussa to 132 Bamako the first rains at the end of April, and then of May and June, begin to feed the river; the flood period begins in June. At the time